





*Provided Photo*

Work will begin early next year on a Forest Preserve District of Will County trail connection project that will provide relief for walkers, runners and bicyclists who travel along Black Road.

The project will provide a safer way to cross Interstate 55 and the DuPage River while traveling from the district's Rock Run Greenway Trail in Joliet to the DuPage River Trail in Shorewood. Construction work is expected to begin in March, according to the Illinois Department of Transportation, which is overseeing the project.

"Constructing the Black Road bike and pedestrian path will allow residents to safely enjoy an important natural resource in the region," Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blankenhorn said. "This project aligns with IDOT's core mission: expanding multimodal travel, connecting communities and enhancing the quality of life for Illinois residents."

The project has been in the forest preserve's plans since 1999 but did not begin to receive grant funding until 2014 and 2015. Grants from the federally funded Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program are providing 80 percent of the funding, with the forest preserve contributing 20 percent as a local share. ITEP is a competitive program for projects that promote alternative transportation options, including bike and pedestrian travel. And CMAQ is designed to improve air quality and mitigate congestion.

IDOT approved a \$2.35 million contract with D Construction on Dec. 13. The low bid came in \$550,000 less than estimates, which will reduce the forest preserve district's share of the project by \$110,000.

In addition to a 260-foot bridge over the DuPage River and a 300-foot bridge over I-55, the project will include new asphalt trail segments along both the south and north sides of Black Road and east of I-55. Traffic signal modifications also will be added at East Frontage Road to make it safer for people to cross from the north side of Black Road to the south side. The pedestrian bridges will be located on the south side of Black Road.

The Black Road trail connection project also will provide a critical link to more than 50 miles of regional trails, including the I&M Canal Trail and the Old Plank Road Trail.

"We've long focused on providing access to forest preserves and linking people, places and nature," said Ralph Schultz, the forest preserve's chief operating officer. "With the connection of these two regional trails, folks in Shorewood, Joliet, Crest Hill, Rockdale and towns farther away are linked to each other and to additional regional and local trails, schools, colleges, libraries and places to shop, eat and explore."

The project is anticipated to be completed in October, but weather and other factors could affect the timeline.